

Acton's Villages



Version: 7/16/2009 3:19 PM

Village Protection Strategies
DRAFT presentation for BoS 7/13/09

We Love our Villages!



“Preserve and Enhance Village Centers”



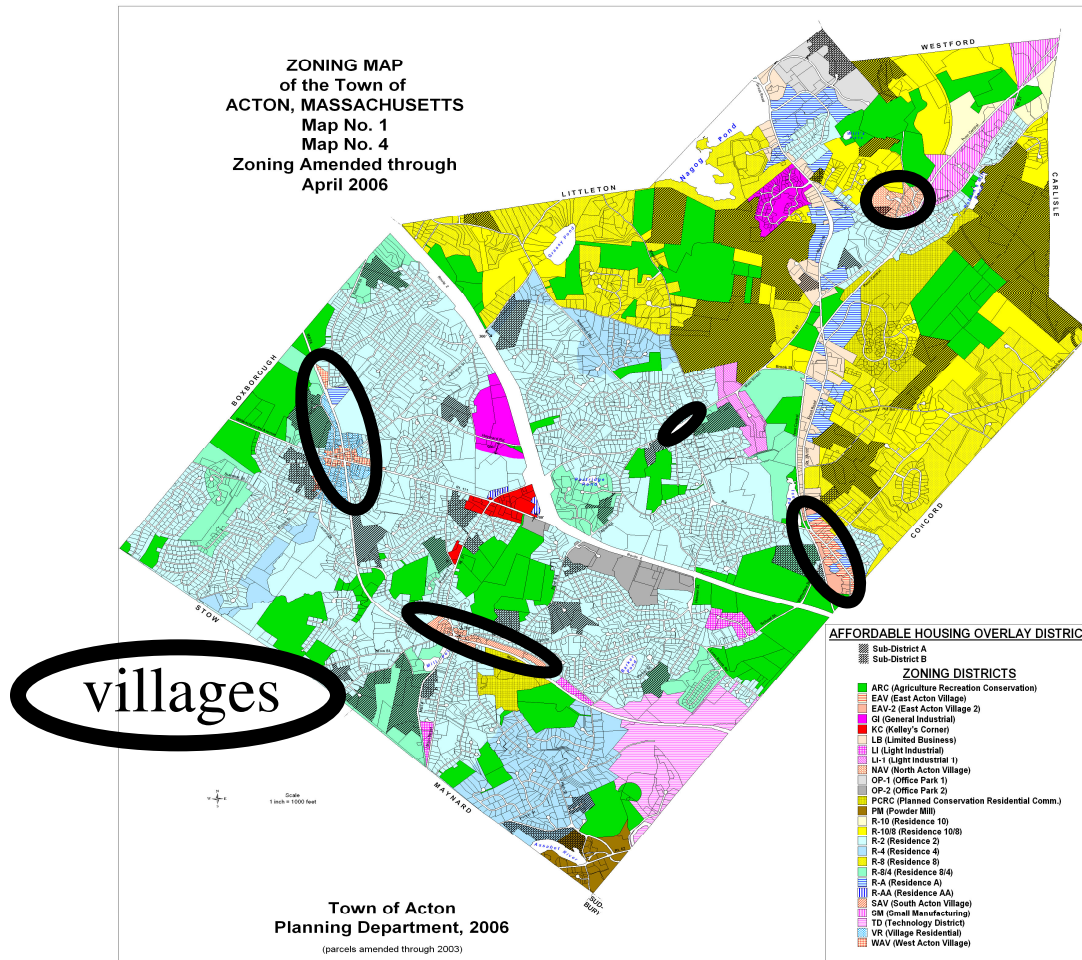
Listed under
**CORE VALUES, GOALS,
AND OBJECTIVES**

Community Visioning 2008

*“In all participation venues
residents expressed a high
degree of appreciation for
the town’s village centers.”*



Not much Land, but Lots of People Live in Villages



“In the Spring of 1992, the West Acton Village Planning Committee mailed survey forms to the 1450 households in the geographic area of West Acton.”

West Acton Village Plan

West Acton Historic District

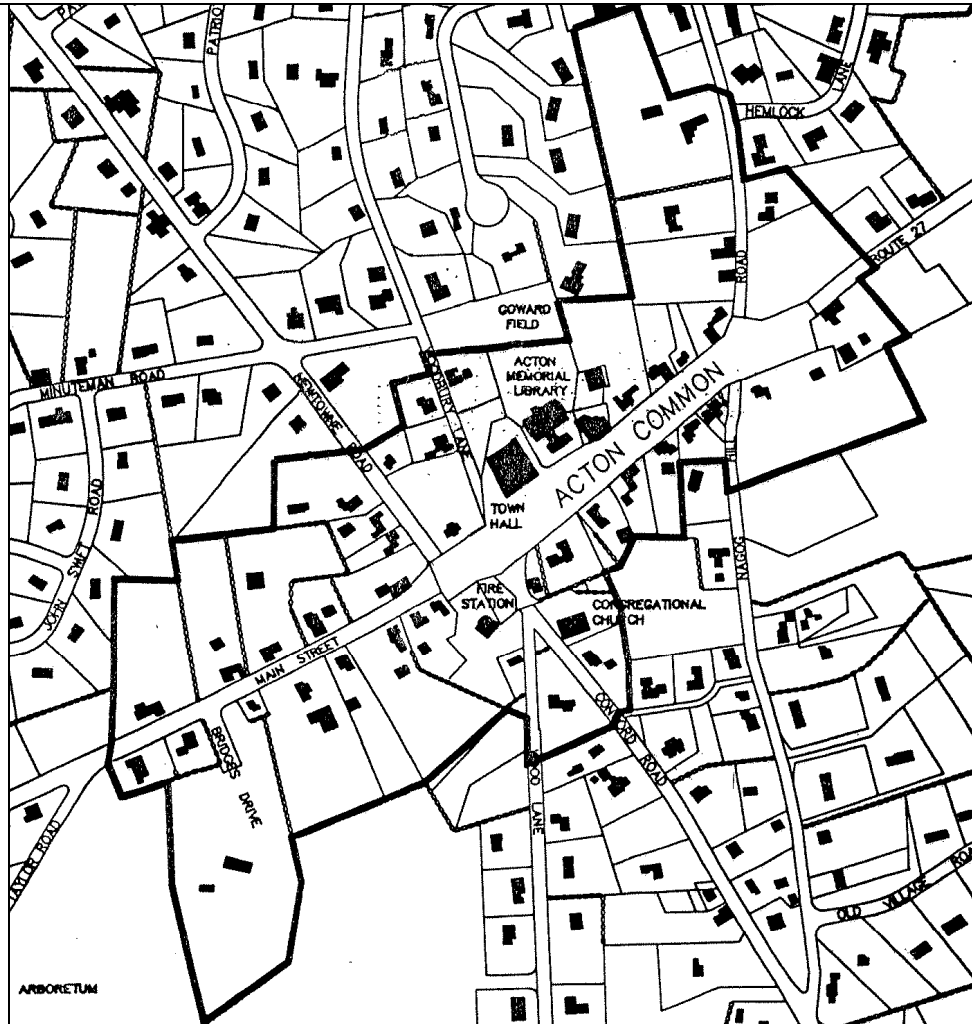


10-12
new units
planned

?

?

Acton Center Historic District



Version:

Challenges Common to All Areas of Acton

- Preserving Town Character
- Minimizing impacts of traffic
- Green Space disappearing and/or threatened
- Economic Development

Unique Challenges for Villages

- Village character is “*fragile*”.
- Dramatic change happens with small number of new buildings/parking lots or demolition of an “important” building.
- Higher density now allowed, with “Village Zoning”, so it multiplies the risk to the village character.

How to Preserve the Villages?

- Lots of Ways
 - Historic District Commission
 - Historical Commission
 - Zoning “tweaks”
 - Strong Design Review in Villages, outside Historic District
 - Economic Development
 - Land Purchase
 - Your ideas?

Issues w/Possible Solutions

- HDC and HC
 - many complicated applications/year
 - focus is on buildings, preserving architectural character, delaying/preventing demolition NOT on many broader social/economic issues unique to the villages
 - no budget, no staff, no time to advocate for larger “Village Protection” issues
 - HDC only covers **PART** of the village

Issues w/Possible Solutions

- Zoning
 - Grandfathering limits effectiveness
 - Changes in zoning can be viewed as a “land taking”
 - “unintended consequences”

Issues w/Possible Solutions

- Stronger Design Review, in Villages, outside Historic District
 - The HDC functions as a “DRB” within historic districts
 - Outside the DRB is used only for “commercial”
 - The DRB is only “advisory” (lacks “teeth”)

Issues w/Possible Solutions

- Village Land Purchase
 - ONE of many “tools” for our planning “toolbox”
 - But current “land purchase system” is slow...small lots move fast, often 2-4 weeks
 - CPC approval cycle can take months
 - Open Space Committee priority list is currently focused on large parcels, greater than one acre, no buildings
 - ACT and OSC staffed by volunteers, not much time for turning around a lot of small parcels

Benefits of Village Land Purchase

- Helps preserve Village Character
 - goal of the overall Town (per Visioning)
 - preserves quality of life
 - preserves and perhaps increases property values of the Town
- Allows the Town more control over development
- It “pays for itself”

Possible Solutions to Explore

- Approaches to Control the Land:
 - buy outright
 - mortgage
 - cash
 - buy a conservation or preservation restriction
 - straight from the seller
 - buy the property, restrict it and resell it

The Town has said: BUY MORE!

“When asked what they want more of, a majority of residents (82.7% of mail survey respondents) said: “open space.” When asked in a variety of forums if they would like the Town to acquire additional open space, a majority responded with a resounding “yes!””

Community Visioning, 2008

Possible Solutions to Explore

- Land Bank,
 - Possible Funding Methods
 - approved by Town Meeting each year or once w/\$ and criteria “limits” (aka “the Ipswich Model”)
 - transfer tax funded, aka Martha’s Vineyard
 - criteria for purchase (size of lot, characteristics)
 - allows staff to move fast on lots that are expected to impact village character
 - BoS approval

One Acre Example

- \$100,000 to purchase/restrict
- 4 units allowed by zoning (more for 40B)
- 3 bedroom units

SAMPLE ASSUMPTIONS

unit price = \$350,000

“cost”/unit/year = \$16,000

tax/unit/year = \$6,000

net “loss”/unit/year = \$10,000

4 units = \$40,000

financing, \$100,000/year = \$6,000

Cost avoidance = \$34,000/acre/year

“BUY IT” COST

\$6,000/8,000 =

\$0.75/yr per household

“DO NOTHING” COST =

\$34,000/8,000 =

\$4.25/yr per household

REPRESENTATIVE NUMBERS, ROUNDED FOR EASE OF UNDERSTANDING

Potential Costs of Village Land Purchase

- Staff: if we choose to pursue more parcels than volunteers can handle, it may require staff
- Asset Management: if we choose to “flip” (buy/sell) units, we have costs of holding/maintaining properties
- Legal fees: Conservation/preservation restrictions require \$

Questions about Land Bank Idea

- How much can we/do we want to afford?
- What criteria do we set?
- What are the “mechanics” to ensure, fast action, while “control” by Town Meeting is preserved?

Recommendation: GroupThink!

- Study Group 1: Finance/Mechanics
- Study Group 2:
 - Village Protection Study Group
 - look at parcels
 - decision criteria
 - examine other options for Village Protection
 - zoning
 - etc

Study Group 1: Finance/Mechanics

- 3 meetings, possibly more, if this looks good
- Counsel recommendations/review
- Examine possible models
 - Ipswich Model
 - “rolling” line item
 - Transfer Tax
 - buy/sell flips w/cons/pres restrictions, w/staff & w/o staff
- Members: Fincom, OSC, EDC, BoS, Village Residents/Business

Study Group 2: Village Advocacy Group

- Look at open parcels
- Determine Criteria for Purchase
- Determine other Village Preservation issues for further study
- Is there enough interest to form an on-going group to “administer” parcel purchase?
- Recommendations to BoS
- Possible longer term Village Study

Acton's Villages



Village Protection Strategies

Version: 7/16/2009 3:19 PM

DRAFT presentation for BoS 7/13/09